

Date: March 10, 2004

To: Senate Finance and Claims Committee

Re: SB 428 - 2-1-1- disaster, emergency, safety, health, human service referral phone service

Dear Chairman Cooney and Committee Members,

For the record, my name is Jean Curtiss. I serve as County Commissioner in Missoula County. I was appointed by Governor Schweitzer to represent Montana counties on the Montana 2-1-1 Community Coalition. I am in support of SB 428- An act providing for a statewide 2-1-1 telephone number.

In July 2000, the FCC reserved the 2-1-1 dialing code for community information and referral services. The 2-1-1 code was intended as an easy to remember and universally recognizable number that would enable a critical connection between individuals and families in need and the appropriate community based organizations and government agencies.

Montana, currently, has 4 established call centers. The one in Missoula recently implemented the 2-1-1 calling code, replacing the First Call for Help number. The other centers have been represented on the coalition and have plans to convert to the 2-1-1 calling code. This legislation would establish statewide oversight and standards so all counties in Montana will be served. With a statewide system, the people in rural areas of the state can call 2-1-1 and their call will be answered. Someone in an established call center will be able to direct them to an agencies or organization to help because of the statewide database.

The Voices for Hope call center in Great Falls applied for and received a \$420,000 grant from the National Library of Medicine to gather data from local communities across Montana to build a statewide data base to support a statewide system. By September, 2005, the goal is to have 85% of the statewide information in a data base. This will be the backbone of a statewide 2-1-1 system.

It is important to establish a statewide system so we don't end up in a situation similar to the E-911 system, where the larger counties went forward and implemented E-911 and now the state is trying to get all 56 counties to join in funding a statewide system. Missoula County, for example, already has a multi-year contract with a telephone service provider for our E-911 and while we are not opposed to contributing to a plan that will be of greater benefit to the small counties we cannot afford to buy out of that contract.

The 2-1-1 Coalition membership is defined in the legislation. This coalition gives existing call centers, counties and others a local voice in the mechanics of implementing the system.

Senator Hillary Clinton and Senator Elizabeth Dole are sponsoring Federal 2-1-1 Legislation that will hopefully have some funding that Montana could apply for if we have a statewide 2-1-1 system in place which would be a bonus. This legislation has bi-partisan support.

I would urge your support of SB 428. Thank you.

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